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ABSTRACT

The University Poll conducted a survey of the opinions of 740 randomly selected Twin Cities campus students toward 14 student services fees required by the University of Minnesota. Results from 624 students, 84 percent of the sample, are reported here. Key findings include: For no fee did a majority of students endorse an immediate reduction or elimination, but for only four fees (health service inpatient and outpatient care, Student Ombudsman Service, and Regents' Aid Fund) did a majority advocate an increase to maintain present programs in the face of inflation. Over 75 percent of the respondents were against having a regular telecommunications fee, although over 40 percent felt that they might be interested in using student telecommunications services in some fashion. Respondents were nearly evenly divided over a proposal to replace the health service inpatient fee with a health insurance requirement. (Author)

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office for student affairs RESEARCH BULLETIN

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A SURVEY OF STUDENT OPINION TOWARD STUDENT SERVICES FEES AT THE UNIVERSITY OF MINNESOTA

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Student Life Studies
University of Minnesota

Abstract

The University Poll conducted a survey of the opinions of 740 randomly selected Twin Cities campus students toward 14 student services fees required by the University of Minnesota. Results from 624 students, 84% of the sample, are reported here. Key findings include: For no fee did a majority of students endorse an immediate reduction or elimination, but for only four fees (Health Service inpatient and outpatient care, Student Ombudsman Service, and Regents' Aid Fund) did a majority advocate an increase to maintain present programs in the face of inflation. Over three-quarters of the respondents were against having a regular telecommunications fee, although over two-fifths felt that they might be interested in using student telecommunications services in some fashion. Respondents were nearly evenly divided over a proposal to replace the Health Service inpatient fee with a health insurance requirement.

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For several years a number of student services at the University of Minnesota have been directly funded at least in part by students through mandatory fees paid at registration. Currently all full time students (those registered six or more credits per quarter) are required to pay fees totalling $49 per quarter over and above their tuition. This amount is distributed among 13 programs and services, including the University Health Service, the Minnesota Union and the Twin Cities Student Assembly, the major unit of student government.

Recommendations regarding the levying and distribution of fees are made by the Student Services Fees Committee which reports to the Twin Cities Student Assembly which in turn makes fee policy recommendations to the Board of Regents. Final determination of fees policies is made by the Regents. Prior to the late 1960s, the Student Services Fees Committee was composed entirely of faculty and staff members with no formal student representation. However, by 1970, the composition of the committee began to change with the inclusion of non-voting student members. Once established, the trend toward student representation rapidly accelerated, with students first gaining equal representation and then completely reversing the original structure of the committee. In its present form, the twelve voting members of the committee are all students elected for two-year terms, with six members of the faculty and administration serving a non-voting, advisory capacity. As part of its charter, the Student Services Fees

Committee is charged with periodically assessing student opinion toward the student services fees.

The first survey of opinions toward student fees was conducted by the University Poll in Winter Quarter of the 1972-73 academic year. This initial survey asked a random sample of students whether each of the major recipients of student fees should continue to receive fee support and whether the student would pay the fee if it were optional. The results of the survey suggested that students were quite selective in their views of fee support for individual services. A majority of respondents favored required fees for individual services. A majority of respondents favored required fees for the Minnesota Daily (68%), the Minnesota Student Association (53%), and the Minnesota Union (52%), with majorities (52-75%) also responding that they would pay optional fees for these services. Fifty percent favored a required fee for the University Health Service, although 75% said they would pay it if it were optional. A majority of students were against requiring fees for the renovation and building of the Minnesota Union (53%), the construction of the Bierman Athletic Building, and the support of the intramural athletics program (72%).

The present survey was commissioned by the Student Services Fees Committee and was conducted by the University Poll during Winter and Spring Quarters of the 1974-75 academic year. The questions asked were expanded over those of the first survey in several ways. The previous survey asked for student opinions of fee requirements in an all or nothing fashion without consideration of the size of the fee received by each program. The economic trends of the past two years suggested that detailed information should be obtained about student views of the amount of money in the fee

supporting each program. Thus, for each fee, students were given the amount of the fee and asked whether the fee should be eliminated, reduced, frozen at its present level (meaning a gradual reduction of services due to inflation), increased as needed to maintain the present level of services, or increased enough to expand services. While the first survey considered only those programs which received the largest amounts of support, the present survey examined opinions toward all fee-supported programs. Additionally, two other kinds of questions were asked. One type asked students about the usage of some of the major fee supported programs in order to test the hypothesis that those who use the service might be more favorable toward supporting it than those who do not use the service. Finally, students were asked to evaluate two proposals currently of interest to the Student Services Fees Committee: A proposed change in the method of funding hospital care for students and a proposal to institute a regular fee for student-operated telecommunications services.

Method

The survey was conducted entirely by mail. Questionnaire items were developed by the staff of the University Poll to cover content areas prescribed by a subcommittee of the Student Services Fees Committee.

Sample: The survey was mailed to a random, computer-generated sample of 740 students from an Admissions and Records file of students registered during Winter Quarter. An additional 19 names were supplied with only out-of-state addresses and were not mailed questionnaires. The sample included both full-time and part-time students (part-time students not paying the fee) on the assumption that differences in opinion between those who paid the fee and those who did not could be analyzed statistically.

Mailing Procedures: Students selected for the sample were first contacted on March 4, 1975 through a pre-letter describing the study. The questionnaire with an accompanying cover letter was mailed three days later on March 7, 1975. Ten days later, immediately before the break between quarters, a postcard follow-up was mailed. On April 1 following the quarter break, non-respondents were mailed a second follow-up letter which included a second questionnaire. A final follow-up postcard to non-respondents was mailed on April 14.

Returns: By April 24, 1975 completed questionnaires had been received from 624 of the 740 students in the sample, for a response rate of 84%. The remaining 116 individuals included 21 with untraceable addresses and 95 who were presumably contacted but chose not to return the questionnaire.

Table 1 presents a comparison of the distribution of the sex, class, and college of the respondents compared to the distribution of these characteristics in the entire student population of the Twin Cities Campus. While the respondents include a somewhat greater proportion of women, seniors, and liberal arts students than in the total population, differences between the sample and population distributions did not approach statistical significance for any of the three characteristics. Comparative population figures were not available for the distribution of part-time versus full-time students. Within the sample, however, comparisons were made between the full-time fee-paying students and the part-time non-fee-paying students in their opinions toward the 14 existing student services fees. No significant differences were found for 10 of the fees. For three of the remaining four fees, the Regents' Aid, the Elections Committee, and the International Programs fees, part-time students favored an increase in the

fee significantly ($p \leq .01$) more than did full-time students. Part-time students were less favorable than were full-time students toward the Athletic Building fee. Even for these four fees the addition of the opinions of the 57 part-time students in the sample to those of the 567 full-time students would have little effect on the total results. Therefore the remainder of the findings presented here include the opinions of both groups combined. Overall, the sampled responses can be considered quite representative of the views of the total Twin Cities Campus student population.

Results

Table 2 presents respondents' opinions about possible actions for required student service fees. The fees receiving the strongest endorsement, with a majority favoring an increase at least to maintain current programs, were the Health Service outpatient care fee (60%), the Regents' Aid Fund fee (56%), and the Student Ombudsman Service fee (50%), and the Health Service inpatient care fee (50%). The required fees receiving the least support, with a plurality favoring the reduction or elimination of the fee, were the Twin Cities Student Assembly fee (44% favoring reduction or elimination), the athletic building fee (41%), the campus elections fee (40%), and the study-travel center (36%). The remainder of the fees received intermediate levels of support. An increase in the fee was the modal response (40-42%) for the fees supporting the Minnesota Daily, the intramural/extramural program, and the music fund, although a majority in each case advocated the freezing, reducing, or eliminating of the fee. Freezing the fee was the modal response for the International Programs fee (41%), the Minnesota Union fee (36%), and the college boards fee (44%).

Table 3 presents the distribution of responses to items concerning

current and proposed students telecommunications efforts. When asked about the development of a direct fee for student telecommunications, over three-quarters of the respondents (78%) responded that the fee should not be required, with 13% in favor of it, and 9% not sure. A somewhat larger percentage (22%) said they would pay an optional telecommunications fee than would support a required fee. Over two-fifths (44%) of the respondents indicated they might be interested in viewing student telecommunications productions or in using telecommunications facilities in some other way, although fewer than one-fifth had ever heard of the current student telecommunications service, the University Community Video Center. Those who were familiar with the present telecommunications center and its productions were significantly more likely to approve a required telecommunications fee and to pay an optional fee.

Table 4 shows responses to items related to the University Health Service. The respondents were almost evenly divided in their views toward a proposal to replace the Health Service inpatient care fee with a health insurance requirement. However, over four-fifths (86%) of the sample felt that any University insurance plan should be optional. Over half the respondents had used the Health Service at least once during the academic year, with 8% reporting that they had at some time (not just in the past year) been hospitalized at the Health Service. Usage of the Health Service was positively related to opinions toward the outpatient care fee. The more frequently the individual had used the Health Service, the more likely he was to advocate some increase in the outpatient care fee.

Table 5 displays distributions of usage of the student unions, the intramural/extramural programs, and the University's athletic facilities.

As for the Health Service outpatient fee and telecommunications fee proposal, those who used these services frequently were more likely to support increases in the fees than were those who used the services less frequently.

Discussion

Two somewhat conflicting trends were evident in students' attitudes toward their student services fees. First, in no case did a majority of respondents wish to eliminate or precipitously reduce any of the current fees. Despite the economic conditions of early 1975, students appear not to want to severely curtail their direct support of the institution's non-classroom activities. However, for only four of the fourteen programs supported by fees did a majority of students feel that the fee should be increased either to expand services or to maintain the current level of service and programming.

Quite clearly the mood of University of Minnesota students is to hold the line on expenditures for student services. While they are not ready to remove their direct support for student services, they are willing to accept gradual attrition in the scope of these programs from an inflationary economy. The four programs not fitting this pattern, the Student Health Service outpatient and inpatient programs, the Regents' Aid Scholarship Fund and the Student Ombudsman Service, can all be characterized as "problem-solving" services, programs directed toward the removal of deficits or difficulties encountered by students. Students seemed less willing to support programs aimed at development, growth or enrichment beyond their classroom experiences. While usage of major student services and support for their fees were positively related, student priorities cannot be explained simply by the conclusion that

students will support only those services which they use. For instance, a majority (51%) of those who did not use the Health Service at all during the previous two quarters still supported some increase in the outpatient care fee while a majority (56%) of those who had watched the programs, "Changing Channels" or "Everybody's TV Time," were still opposed to a proposed $1.00 telecommunications fee.

The fiscal conservatism and selectivity of students may not be a new development. For example, in the first fee survey two years ago, four-fifths of the respondents were opposed to a 50¢ per quarter fee for a student-operated FM radio station, just as over three-quarters of the respondents in the present survey were opposed to the telecommunications fee proposal. The greatest discrepancy between the results of the present survey and those of two years ago is the difference in support for student government. In the first survey, small majorities of the respondents felt that a fee for the Minnesota Student Association should be required (53%) and would pay this fee if it were optional (59%). In the present survey, a plurality (44%) felt that the fee for the Twin Cities Student Assembly should be eliminated or cut back, with only 12% responding that it should be increased sufficiently to maintain the organization's present scope. It might be surmised that the Twin Cities Student Assembly is not seen as a problem solving organization in the way that the Student Ombudsman Service and the Health Service are.

The student priorities discernible in the present data raise questions about the emerging direction of student personnel work. A growing trend in the field in recent years has been to view the central focus of student personnel work as student development, fostered through innovative extra-classroom educational experiences, closely coordinated with classroom experiences (Williamson, and Biggs, 1975; Creamer, 1975). While

students may also endorse the concept of student development, the results of this survey suggest that they may not be enthusiastic about supporting growth-oriented services with their own money. When asked to pay, students are likely to be most receptive to funding traditional problem-solving or deficit-directed student services.

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Creamer, D. G. Implementing student development. Paper presented at the 1975 Annual Convention of the American College Personnel Association, Atlanta, Georgia.

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Table 1

CHARACTERISTICS OF SAMPLE AND POPULATION

		Respondents		Winter Quarter Totals[a]	
Number of credits taken winter quarter		5 or fewer	6 or more		
		9%	91%		
Sex		Male	Female	Male	Female
		58%	42%	61%	39%
Class	Freshman	17%		16%	
	Sophomor	17%		18%	
	Junior	18%		18%	
	Senior	22%		18%	
	Graduate or Adult Special	26%		30%	
		N=602			
College	CLA	41%		38%	
	IT	10%		9%	
	AFHE	8%		8%	
	GC	5%		6%	
	Ed	6%		5%	
	Grad, Law, Med	16%		21%	
	Other	14%		13%	
		N=613			

[a]Extrapolated from official winter quarter registration statistics.

Table 2

Fee Survey 13

PERCENTAGE DISTRUBUTION OF RESPONSES TO STUDENT SERVICES FEES OPTIONS[a]

	N	Fee Eliminated	Fee Reduced	Fee Frozen	Fee increased, maintain services	Fee increased, expand services	No Opinion
1. Health Service outpatient care ($21.50) supports doctors, staff, and facilities for student out-patient care.	621	6	9	24	54	6	2
2. Regents Aid fund ($1.88) helps Student Financial Aid Office assist students.	614	8	7	29	42	14	2
3. Student Ombudsman Service (5c) funds a student operated service to answer bureaucratic questions, mediate academic problems, and make referrals to helping agencies.	613	8	6	35	39	11	2
4. Health Service inpatient care ($5.00) entitles students to 30 days per quarter of hospitalization.	620	10	5	33	46	4	2
5. Board of Student Publications ($1.80) supports 50 issues of Minnesota Daily per quarter and other student publications.	616	7	11	40	38	2	2
6. Intramural/extramural sports ($2.41) pays for intramural/extramural sports activities and maintenance of facilities.	616	16	12	32	31	9	1
7. Music fund (31c) helps pay cost of University bands, chorus, and other student musical groups.	618	16	9	35	32	7	2
8. International programs (15c) helps fund student programs for foreign students and intercultural activities for all students.	613	14	12	41	25	6	2
9. Student Union fee ($12.50) supports staff, maintenance, building programs of Coffman, St. Paul and West Bank Unions, and associated commons areas.	619	9	24	36	26	3	1
10. College boards (15c) funds activities of the University's college boards, the major unit of student government within each college.	613	14	14	44	24	2	3
11. Study-travel fund (10c) helps students who plan to travel or study abroad.	619	28	8	35	23	5	2
12. Athletic building fund ($2.35) pays for construction of facilities for intercollegiate athletics, intramural sports and physical education classes.	619	23	18	30	24	6	1
13. Elections Committee (5c) funds production of ballots and supervision of campus elections.	613	27	13	41	16	1	2
14. Twin Cities Student Assembly (75c) pays for stipends, supplies and activities of TCSA, the major unit of student government.	619	24	20	40	12	1	3

[a] Responses may sum to under or over 100% for each item due to rounding of decimals

Required student services fees currently total $49.00 per quarter. These fees are distributed among a variety of organizations to provide services, activities, and facilities for all students. In a period of inflation, maintaining the current level of any one of these functions will require a gradual increase over the next few years in the fee supporting it. Freezing a fee at its current level would result in a gradual reduction in services. To add or expand a service either the total fees would have to be increased or other fee supported services cut back. Below is a list of the ways student fees are currently spent. Please circle what you think should be done with each fee.

Table 3[a]

PERCENTAGE DISTRIBUTION OF RESPONSES TO TELECOMMUNICATIONS ITEMS

	Yes	No	No Opinion
Should a $1.00 telecommunications fee be one of the student services fees required of all students?	13%	78%	9%
Would you pay the $1.00 telecommunications fee if it were optional?	22%	70%	8%

Which of the following student telecommunications services would you be interested in using? (Check all that you might be interested in)

Watching or listening to video tapes, TV or radio programs (produced by students about student and community concerns)	27%	44% checked at least one interest
Receiving instruction in filmmaking, radio or TV production	25%	
Being part of the center's staff, either paid or as a volunteer	8%	
Using the center's facilities to produce video tapes, radio programs or films	18%	
Using the center's facilities as a resource in your academic course-work (e.g. making a film instead of a term paper)	25%	
None	47%	
Checked no items	9%	

	Yes	No
Have you ever listened to WMMR, the student operated closed circuit radio station serving the residence halls?	19%	81%
Have you ever watched "Changing Channels" (10 pm Wed.) or "Everybody's TV Time" (10:30 pm Wed.) on KTCA, Channel 2?	14%	86%

	Yes	No	Not Sure
Have you ever heard of the University Community Video Center, a student controlled video access and production center on the West Bank Campus?	18%	74%	8%
Have you ever taken a telecommunications-related course at the University?	9%	89%	2%

Respondents who had watched "Changing Channels" or "Everybody's TV Time", who had heard of the Community Video Center or who had taken a telecommunications course at the University were significantly ($p \leq .01$) more likely to support a required telecommunications fee than those who had not.

[a] Questions were prefaced with the following description of current and proposed telecommunications funding:

Currently students indirectly fund a student operated telecommunications center through money from the West Bank Union budget and a telecommunications fee collected from 1970-72. This indirect support totals about 75¢ per student per quarter. A proposal has been made to replace this indirect telecommunications support with a direct mandatory fee of $1.00 per student per quarter. This fee would pay for a variety of telecommunications services to students, including training in video production, access to telecommunications equipment and the production of films, TV and radio programs.

Table 4[a]

PERCENTAGE DISTRIBUTION OF RESPONSES TO HEALTH SERVICE AND INSURANCE ITEMS

	Yes	No	No Opinion
Should the health insurance requirement be substituted for the mandatory $5.00 fee?	45%	47%	8%

	Mandatory	Optional	No Opinion
If the hospitalization fee is replaced, should the University's own health insurance policy be mandatory or optional?	9%	86%	5%

How many times have you used the Health Service this past fall and winter quarters?	None 45%
	1-5 times 45%
	Over 5 times 10%

	Yes	No
Have you ever been hospitalized as an inpatient (overnight or longer) in the Health Service Inpatient Facility?	8%	92%

The Health Service fees give students a number of health care services. What other kind(s) of health insurance coverage do you have? (Check all that apply):

No other coverage	19%
Covered by parents' health insurance	41%
Covered by the University's Supplementary Blue Cross plan	19%
Covered by insurance provided by an employer	17%
Covered by own private insurance policy	14%

Respondents who used the Health Service frequently were significantly ($p \leq .01$) more likely to favor some increase in the Health Service Outpatient Care fee than were those who did not.

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[a]The Health Service fee opinion items were prefaced with the following:

A proposal has been made to replace the required $5.00 per quarter hospitalization fee (covering 70 days of hospital care at the Health Service, but not physicians' fees) with a requirement that all students carry some form of health insurance. The University would offer a health insurance policy at $15.00 per quarter which would pay physicians' and surgeons' fees and 70 days of care at any hospital.

Table 5

PERCENTAGE DISTRIBJTION OF RESPONSES TO

ATHLETICS AND UNION USAGE ITEMS

	Yes	No	Not Sure
Did you participate in any intramural/extramural sports activities during fall or winter auarter?	25%	74%	1%
Have you ever used the Bierman Athletic Building? . . .	22%	77%	2%
Have you ever used Bierman Field?	25%	74%	1%

How often do you usually use one of the University's athletic facilities (either for team sports, individual sports or general recreation)? . . . . . Never 43%

Less than once a month 18%

Once a month 7%

2-3 times a month 13%

Once a week or more 20%

Respondents were significantly more likely ($p \leq .01$) to favor some increase in the Intramural/Extramural and Athletic Building fees if they had participated in intramural/extramural activities, if they frequently used the University's athletic facilities and if they had used the Bierman Building or Field. Also, significantly more men than women favored some increase in the intramural/extramural and Athletic Building fees.

How often do you usually use one of the student unions (Coffman, West Bank, St. Paul)? . . . . . 6-7 days a week 3%

4-5 days a week 14%

2-3 days a week 16%

About once a week 14%

Less than once a week 52%

Respondents were significantly more likely ($p \leq .01$) to support some increase in the Minnesota Union fee if they used the student unions frequently than if they did not.